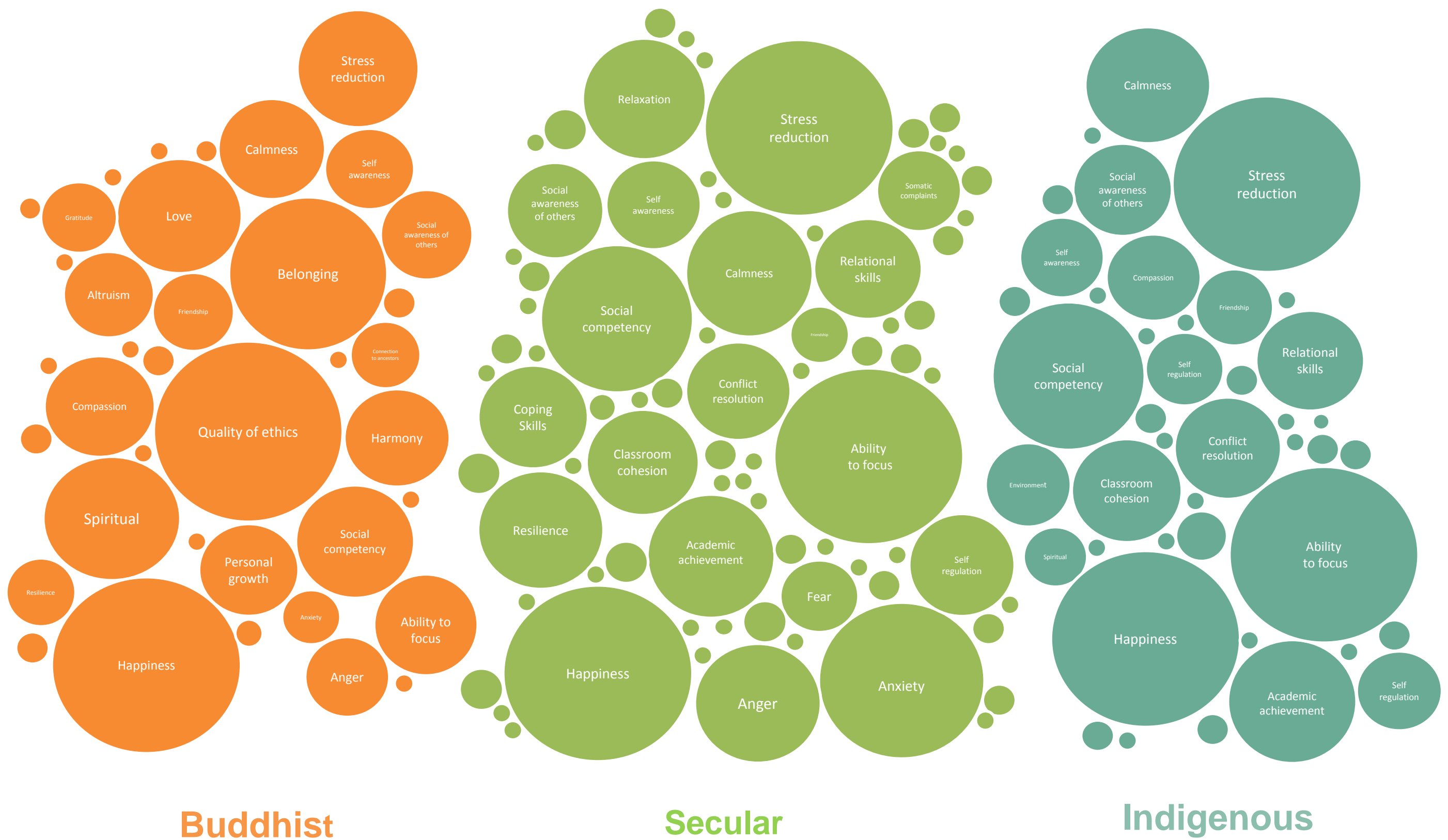


Mindfulness in Schools: A Conceptual Review on Wellbeing

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Introduction

There is a growing portion of school-aged children experiencing a wide variety of social, emotional and behavioural problems that interfere with their academic achievement and interpersonal relationships. The practice of mindfulness as a tool has been adopted in schools to help students improve attention and focus, cognitive functioning, stress management, emotions regulation, and social-emotional resiliencies (Felver, Celis-de Hoyos, Tezanos, & Singh, 2016; Waters, Barsky, Ridd, & Allen, 2015; Thurman and Torsney, 2014). A large number of international and regional providers have developed their own customised programmes adopting the concepts of mindfulness to meet this need. Thus creating a wide variation in the practice of mindfulness with a wide range of definitions and meanings of wellbeing (Davidson and Kaszniak, 2015). Further there is a limited research on the translation and implementation of mindfulness in the school setting. There is need for an examination of the applications of mindfulness and possible concerns about its use. The aim of this study is to identify the applications of mindfulness and its mechanisms of change for the promotion of wellbeing in children.

Methods

A comprehensive and systematic search in 11 databases was conducted: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Education Index Retrospective, Education Research Complete, Education Source, ERIC, A+ Education, Discover, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Search key terms included 'mindfulness', 'meditation', 'school', 'wellbeing', 'wellness' and 'children'. The studies needed to meet the following criteria to be selected for analysis: (1) English articles that were published in a peer-reviewed journals, (2) studies were research-based content, (3) the initiative explicitly mentioned the utilisation of mindfulness-based practices such as mindful breathing or the body scan as core elements, (4) the implementation was in a school setting, (5) the participants were pupils enrolled in primary, elementary or high schools aged 6-18 years (6) the initiative was fully described and qualitatively and/or quantitatively investigated and (7) the article focus discussed the concept of wellbeing. Initiatives combining mindfulness with other techniques were excluded. Similarly, with articles that investigated the use of mindfulness in clinical settings. Conference presentations and dissertation studies were not accessed. Applying these criteria, a total of 54 articles were located and reviewed.

Results

The analysis revealed that most studies reported decreased psychosocial difficulties and increased wellbeing following mindfulness intervention. There were three main applications of mindfulness: Buddhist, Secular and indigenous. The secular approach was delivered without any religious and spiritual references. Mindfulness meditation was regarded as a tool to develop personal skills for self-improvement. Improvements in stress reduction social competence and academic achievement were reported. The indigenous perspective applied an integration of mindfulness into the cultural-specific health models as the central element of the mindfulness initiatives. They offered interpretations of the interrelationships among physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing. Health domains were extended to the wider social systems. In the Buddhist application, the connection between mindfulness and moral principles was imperative to the Buddhist philosophy. Mindfulness meditation was seen as part of daily life and spiritual functioning which resonated with traditional practices. Developing awareness for understanding the body and mind, appreciating human relationships and enhancing the quality of ethics to foster belonging and caring for others were observed.

Discussion

The adaptability of mindfulness practice in education settings was evident. School-based mindfulness initiatives were implemented in diverse cultural settings. A large number of measures were applied to investigate the effects of mindfulness intervention. The concept of wellbeing was varied widely in definitions and meanings. Overall, school-based mindfulness programmes have the potential to improve a child's social, emotional, mental and spiritual health domains. However, it is important to understand the mechanisms of change resulting from the cultural translation and implementation of mindfulness practice to develop a framework for assessing health outcomes for children. Understanding the specific approaches will determine the adopted practices ranging from a set of teaching tools linked to improved performance to a set of holistic processes. Wellbeing associated with mindfulness school-based initiatives is an emergent concept and requires conceptual clarification to identify its significance, use and application. Understanding the concept of wellbeing in mindfulness intervention programmes has important practical and theoretical implications for the development and delivery of health promotion initiatives in schools.

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